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*Madonna and Child,
with Angels, Saints and a Donor*

*Fra Giovanni da Fiesole,
called Beato Angelico (1387-1455)*

Gift of Mrs. W. Scott Fitz

Madonna and Child with Angels, Saints and a Donor

*Fra Giovanni da Fiesole, called Beato Angelico
(1387-1455)*

IF the representation of Fra Angelico in a gallery had to be restricted to but one painting, it would be difficult to choose a more broadly and delightfully typical example than the panel that Mrs. W. Scott Fitz has given to the Boston Museum. For almost thirty years it has hung in the collection of M. Edouard Aynard at Lyons, virtually unknown to the critics of Italian art, unmentioned even in the many monographs upon the Dominican friar. Vasari had not seen it, or at least does not record it. There can be no question, however, as to its authenticity; the picture speaks for itself, and, to make assurance doubly sure, the greatest connoisseur upon Italian art, Bernhard Berenson, includes it in the latest lists of the Florentine painters of the Renaissance, and Langton Douglas, the chief English biographer of Fra Angelico, although he was not aware of its existence when he published his book in 1902, accepts it in a note on page 104 in the fourth volume of his recent edition of Crowe and Cavalcaselle. The size is diminutive. Enclosed in an octagonal frame of Gothic shape, it measures in height and width only eleven and a half inches. The technical process is, of course, *tempera*. In the centre the Virgin is enthroned upon a dais, which is draped and surmounted by a canopy of diapered gold. She is clad in the traditional colors of a red gown and a blue mantle and wears upon her head a kerchief of veiling. In her hands she reverently holds the Child, whose lower body is wrapped in the transparent tissue so often used by Fra Angelico for this figure. He leans solemnly forth to bless the kneeling donor, a man of about middle age; the full pink surplice reveals the priest and the ermine scarf, or *almucia*, the canon. Behind, at the side of the throne, four angels, two in profile and dressed in blue, and two in full face and dressed in red, stand in positions of adoration. At the right of Our Lady are introduced St. Peter in a blue tunic and yellow robe, distinguishable by the short, gray beard and the attribute of the keys, and, partially hidden, his constant iconographic companion, St. Paul, recognizable by the long, dark beard. The place of honor at the right assigned to the former, and the circumstance of his presentation of the donor to the Holy Mother and Child, render it likely that he was the patron of the priest, whose name was thus probably Pietro. At the left the splendor of a sacred warrior, encased in armor and a pink tabard and bearing a white banner crossed in red, is considered sufficient balance for the three-fold group upon the opposite side. Although the dragon is lacking, he is possibly St. George, who was so prominent in the category of military saints that the artist perhaps thought it unnecessary to designate him by further insignia. The whole

celestial *tableau vivant* is set in the midst of one of those thick-grown and luxuriant gardens which were introduced at this time into the repertoire of Florentine painting by Domenico Veneziano, and were much employed by Fra Angelico, especially as backgrounds to his several large Annunciations. Neither here nor in any other of his works is there that botanical definition of the shrubbery and flowers eventually achieved by his younger contemporary, Fra Filippo Lippi.

Many more pretentious and famous works embody but one phase of his style, such as the Madonna of the Star, in the monastery of San Marco at Florence, which is confined to his more conservative manner of the miniaturist, or the frescoes in the studio of Nicholas V in the Vatican, which show him in the vanguard of the most progressive tendencies of the age; but this is an epitome of the friar's whole development. Fra Angelico has been the victim of a widely prevalent, popular misunderstanding, based upon an ignorance of all but a small, and that perhaps the worst, part of his production and upon unfamiliarity with the conditions of Florentine art at the beginning of the fifteenth century. He is conceived as an ecstatic monk, concerned only with the unreal suggestion of the mystic things of religion and not at all with the representation of things as they are, still clinging in the seclusion of the cloister to the traditions of medieval painting, while his rivals were evolving the new style of the Renaissance. His mysticism, to be sure, is preëminently characteristic, and compared with Masaccio or with the synchronous school of scientific investigators who happened to light upon painting as the sphere of their research, such as Paolo Uccello and Andrea del Castagno, he may be described as to a certain extent a conservative in a group with Don Lorenzo Monaco and Benozzo Gozzoli; but this description is in no sense the whole truth about him. He was by birth too great an artist to neglect the problems of linear perspective, anatomy, and individualization that the naturalistic coterie were solving, and he himself made considerable and daring personal innovations, contributing to the general technical advance, such as the study of landscape and aerial perspective. He belongs as much to the dawning Renaissance as to the waning Middle Ages. Absorbed as he was in Christian meditation, he yet manifests, like St. Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa, the vital interest in the movements of his day which is the paradox of mysticism. His life affords the unusual and happy union of the purest religion with a keen and practical artistic sense. His method is to study the life about him and to exalt that to the skies.

Both these aspects of Fra Angelico's genius are fused together in the example newly acquired by the Boston Museum. Most retrogressive, as usual, are the angels, whose forms, though perhaps with a conscious spiritual intent upon the part of the painter, do not exist in three dimensions. Gothic,



Madonna and Child: detail

Enlarged to seven-fourths natural size

Fra Angelico

too, is the flow of the Virgin's and St. Peter's enveloping garments, marking Fra Angelico as the pupil of Don Lorenzo Monaco and as one of that series of Florentine linealists who, drawing their inspiration from the focus of Gothicism in Italy, Siena, prepared the way for Botticelli, the greatest master of line that the western world has produced. But his medievalism requires further elucidation. As unmistakably here as in any other of his works he appears as a participant in the "international" movement of European painting, at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth century, which has received proper attention only in the last few years. At this period there was evolved a style common in all its essentials to every great country in Europe, but having its hearth in Burgundy and derived partly from the methods of illuminations in manuscripts and partly from Sienese models. Its main qualities were a cult of splendor, of the picturesque and decorative, a predilection for slender figures and calligraphic outline, an emphasis upon delicately executed detail and episodic, often humorous, *genre*, to the sacrifice of monumental composition, a delight in garden settings and smiling landscapes, and a quaint realism consisting not so much in the correct rendition of form as in the importation of elements from contemporary life, especially the French costumes that were the general vogue. The school counted among its exponents in Spain such an artist as Borrassá, and in Italy (to mention only the greatest names) Gentile da Fabriano, Masolino, and Pisanello. Fra Angelico's indebtedness to the movement is here evident at every point — in the profusion of gold upon the *balдах* and the halos, in the daintiness of the angelic figures, in the flow of line, in the chivalric garb and gorgeousness of the knight, in the arboreal background, and above all, in the richer tonality of the whole, recalling Gentile, in contrast to the paler scheme in which he himself and the other Florentines usually worked.

The international school may be regarded as in some respects forestalling the Renaissance; but this picture demonstrates that its author was fully alive to the more pronounced developments that occurred in Italian art at the beginning of the Quattrocento. The saints have much of that firm modelling which was the glory of Masaccio, and indeed Sts. Peter and Paul are distinctly reminiscent of Masaccio's creations. As Mr. Berenson would put it, they possess "tactile values." The Virgin is very much of flesh and blood, no pious emanation from his own imagination, but rather an idealization of the joys and sorrows of human motherhood. Following the precedent of Donatello and the progressive sculptors, he may be seen in a series of altarpieces to have gradually stripped the Infant more and more of His doll-like dress, until now He is virtually nude. The body is fairly well drawn and awakens the suspicion that the friar, contrary to the usual opinion, may have actually studied from undraped models. The donor

is convincingly characterized and is realized in three dimensions better than the other constituents of the scene. Since he is one of but two portraits in the master's preserved works,* he much increases the value of the panel and assists us to reconstruct in our mind's eye the style of those representations of contemporaries for Nicholas V in a non-extant chapel that adjoined St. Peter's at Rome.

Because of all these developments the writer of the present notice would date the picture rather late in Fra Angelico's career, about 1445, at the end of his Florentine period or at the beginning of his culminating period at Rome, when he had partially abandoned his medieval manner and was emerging into a leader of the new tendencies. The folds of drapery are broader and less angular than in his first productions, which are under the influence of Don Lorenzo Monaco. The delineation, especially of the apostles, is not as cramped, the outlines are not so sharp as in the typical work of the immediately preceding years, the great but ruined altarpiece of San Marco, now in the Florentine Academy. The freer drawing becomes evident by a comparison of St. Peter with the same apostle in the picture at San Domenico, Fiesole. Some of the figures are strikingly similar to those of the frescoed cycle in the Vatican, the chief result of his sojourn in the eternal city. It perhaps means nothing that the vestments of the donor correspond exactly to those of the attendant clerics at the right in the Ordination of St. Lawrence; but the feminine type in the Virgin recalls the seated women listening to the sermon of St. Stephen; St. Peter is identical with the St. Peter of St. Stephen's Ordination, and St. Paul with the St. Paul of the Lapidation of St. Stephen, even to the bald head.

The importance of such an acquisition to the Boston Museum is hard to overestimate. Its significance as a document for the study of Fra Angelico's evolution I have sought to indicate. Several elements of its æsthetic value I have touched upon in passing; many others might be enumerated, especially the artist's usual charm of pure and harmoniously disposed colors. By a curious but not inexplicable psychological phenomenon, the great masters of line have always been more concerned than the great masters of form with the spiritual content of their creations; and it is in accord with this principle that the new panel expresses the unsullied piety of a man who had purposed to lay up treasure in heaven, and meantime, as so often happens, by very reason of his single-heartedness, had laid up an incalculable treasure upon earth. Together with the examples in the Altman Collection, New York, the Johnson Collection, Philadelphia, and particularly the excellent illustrations of his early manner in the Morgan Library, New York, and Fenway Court,

* The other is a cardinal in a Crucifixion belonging to M. Noe Valois at Paris.



Saints Peter and Paul: detail

Enlarged to seven-fourths natural size

Fra Angelico



St. George: detail

Enlarged to seven-fourths natural size

Fra Angelico

Boston, it enables Americans to form an adequate conception of Fra Angelico within the limits of their own country. CHANDLER R. POST.

Minute of the Trustees

THE Trustees of the Museum have passed the following minute in recognition of the gift of this picture:

"The Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts have to express again their satisfaction and happiness in the interest of Mrs. W. Scott Fitz in the Museum. This interest has been shown and proved by many splendid gifts, not the least of which is the last,—the beautiful panel of Fra Angelico. It is a master-work of its type: a delightful picture, for which not only the Trustees, but the people of Boston, will be forever grateful."

Lecture Course on the Practical Application of Artistic Principles

TO help people understand works of art, to develop their standards of artistic appreciation, is the educational work peculiar to a museum. A new phase of this work has been the giving during the past months of two evening courses, "The Practical Application of Artistic Principles," an undertaking perhaps unique among museum activities.

These courses were planned for salesmen, buyers, and designers. They were not classes in drawing and design; no skill of hand was taught; they were given to cultivate artistic appreciation and discrimination.

For the convenience of those who wished to attend, two sets of ten lectures were arranged, one on Tuesday and one on Friday evenings. The latter evenings were devoted to the consideration of jewelry and silverware, the former to the many objects of household use. The average attendance was twenty-four; some of the stores represented were Bigelow, Kennard Co., Chandler and Co., A. H. Davenport Co., Jones, McDuffee and Stratton Co., Jordan Marsh Co., John H. Pray Sons Co., A. Shuman and Co., and Smith, Patterson Co. Mr. A. A. Bacon of Chandler and Co., Mr. Robert Jordan of Jordan Marsh Co., and Mr. M. N. Smith of Smith, Patterson Co., were particularly helpful in giving advice and encouragement.

The classes were conducted by Mr. Huger Elliott, Supervisor of Educational Work in the Museum and Director of the Department of Design in the Museum School. The courses began with discussions of the theories underlying the use of line, form, color, and ornament. Each theory was tested and was then applied to the objects to be found in the stores of Boston. The lectures were illustrated by lantern slides made especially for this course, by charts and diagrams, by merchandise lent by the firms represented and by the study of

the textiles, furniture, ceramics, silver, and jewelry in the collections of the Museum. The collection of photographs in the Library of the Museum also supplied a great deal of illustrative material.

Alterations of the Building

IN view of the fact that the Department of Paintings and the Department of Prints are soon to be installed in the new Robert Dawson Evans Memorial Galleries, the space vacated by these departments has been distributed among the other departments of the Museum, thus affording them needed room for expansion.

To the Japanese Department is given the whole of the wing it now occupies and the four picture galleries to the west of the rotunda. The exhibition space of this Department is thus nearly doubled. In order to give the Department all the rooms on the entrance floor of the Japanese wing the offices of the Director and his assistants have been moved to the former panel picture room and the Superintendent's stock room; the office of the Secretary and the study rooms for the Department of Western Art, including Textiles, will be moved to the former rooms of the Print Department, and the Bremgarten and Lawrence Rooms will be moved into the new wing.

The large modern picture gallery east of the rotunda has been assigned to our growing collection of the art of the Nearer Orient. The remaining two easterly galleries have been given to the Egyptian Department, which also gains some room on the entrance floor.

It is expected that the necessary alterations and the new installation will be completed before the first of November.

In the course of the changes an effort will be made to keep as many of the present galleries open as possible. During September and October all the galleries of paintings will be closed, and such pictures as can be shown will be temporarily installed in the Renaissance Court.

The Print Collector's Quarterly

THE April issue of the *Quarterly*, the initial number of Volume IV, contains the following illustrated articles:

"Martin Schongauer," by Dr. Max Geisberg, Director of the Landes-Museum, Münster, Germany.

"The Memoirs and Journal of Jean-Georges Wille (1715-1808)," by Louis R. Metcalfe.

"J. André Smith," by J. Nilsen Laurvik.

"Some French Etchers and Sonneteers," by William Aspenwall Bradley.

The *Quarterly* is published for the Museum by Houghton Mifflin Company. Subscriptions may be addressed to the Company, either at 4 Park Street, Boston, or 14 East Fortieth Street, New York. The subscription price is \$1.00 per year.